

VZCZCXRO5349
PP RUEHGI RUEHMA RUEHROV
DE RUEHKH #0538 0981436
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
P 071436Z APR 08
FM AMEMBASSY KHARTOUM
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 0494
INFO RUCNFUR/DARFUR COLLECTIVE
RHMFISS/CJTJF HOA

UNCLAS KHARTOUM 000538

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE
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DEPT FOR AF/SPG, S/CRS, AF/C
DEPT PLS PASS USAID FOR AFR/SUDAN

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [KPKO](#) [SOCI](#) [AU](#) [SU](#)

SUBJECT: GOS BORDER INTELLIGENCE FORCE SPARKS GUNFIRE IN EL FASHER
MARKET

THE SEQUENCE OF EVENTS

¶1. (SBU) On April 6 at approximately 1330, United Nations Department of Safety and Security (UNDSS) in El Fasher, North Darfur, warned that "groups of combatants from the GoS Military Camp intend to cause problems in the market area, due to unsatisfactory welfare conditions." A group of Border Intelligence Unit (BIU) forces traveled through El Fasher market, firing in the air to express their dissatisfaction with their living conditions and GoS non-payment of salaries. At that time UNDSS advised staff to exercise caution when driving through the market area.

¶2. (SBU) International Non-Governmental Organizations (INGOs) reported shots heard at close range until approximately 1445 [NOTE: Many INGOs are headquartered within close proximity to the central market area. END NOTE]. Local residents were reported to be running from the market area and vehicles in the area evacuated as well.

¶3. (SBU) UNDSS told FieldOff at 1530 on April 6 that the BIF had moved on to the North Darfur Wali's (Governor's) residence to continue its protest there. UNDSS reported that GoS police were on the scene in the market to secure the area and that traffic through the area was prohibited. A weekly 1530 Inter-Agency meeting convened by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) was cancelled due to the incident. National Intelligence and Security Services (NISS) officials were also on the scene in the market. Local shop-owners staged a demonstration at the Wali's office to make sure the government protects local businesses.

¶4. (SBU) By 1600 on April 6, traffic began to flow again around the main market road. GoS armored vehicles were parked at the entrance to the Military Camp area, just north of the Wali's office. The BIU forces announced that they would return to town if the GoS did not address their grievances.

¶5. (SBU) As of 0800 on April 7, the security situation in El Fasher is reportedly calm. The Wali addressed the issue on local TV and expressed GoS regret over the incident, describing it as an "administrative" problem and stressing that the perpetrators will be arrested and submitted to a military disciplinary board.

ACCOUNTABILITY AND CASUALTIES

¶6. (SBU) At the first report of violence in the market, Embassy staff got off the roads and consolidated at the Green House, Blue House and USAID Houses. FieldOff corresponded by mobile and satellite phone with the Embassy. Internet and telephone service remained operational during the incident.

¶7. (SBU) As of 2200 on April 6, casualty reports remained unconfirmed. UNDSS initially reported at 1530 that one person had

been killed but later at 1730 amended that figure to three or four killed. Ahmed Bahr, a member of the North Darfur legislature, told emboff at 2230 that there was at least one casualty, specifically naming 24-year-old Abdallah Adam Muhammad. By 0900 on April 7 it was reported that there was in fact one person killed and three wounded; in his television broadcast, the Wali sent his condolences to the families of the dead and the injured. Initial reports indicated the number of wounded had been at least ten. The GoS security presence in El Fasher remains heavy.

18. (SBU) COMMENT: While the El Fasher market area is prone to security incidents, there has not been an incident similar to that of April 6 since December 2006. While BIU dissatisfaction with the GoS for unfulfilled promises with regard to rank and money is also nothing new, it has not recently manifested itself in downtown El Fasher to such a degree. The incident shows once again the extent to which janjaweed forces that have been integrated into "official" forces are essentially guns for hire and are willing to exert very public pressure on the GOS to meet their demands. They obviously know that the GOS is vulnerable to their demands, because without the janjaweed BIU forces (some of whom are Chadian Arabs especially in the West) the GOS would not be able to wage war effectively in Darfur.

19. (U) Tripoli minimize considered.

FERNANDEZ